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Trump's Refusal to Aid Biden Transition Mirrors Pre-9/11 Vulnerability

New fears build on old conclusions that one aspect of Trump's lame duck presidency recreates a government shortcoming in the lead-up to the Sept. 11 attacks.

By **Paul D. Shinkman**, Senior Writer, National Security Nov. 16, 2020, at 10:51 a.m.

"With a pandemic raging and threats around the globe, the Trump administration's dangerous choice to withhold information from America's next president is a needless, avoidable, self-inflicted blow to national security and public health," Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island said in a statement. (TASOS KATOPODIS/GETTY IMAGES)

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's refusal to concede the election to President-elect Joe Biden represents a conspicuous national security threat, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee is warning, highlighting a unique vulnerability that has resulted in deadly attacks before.

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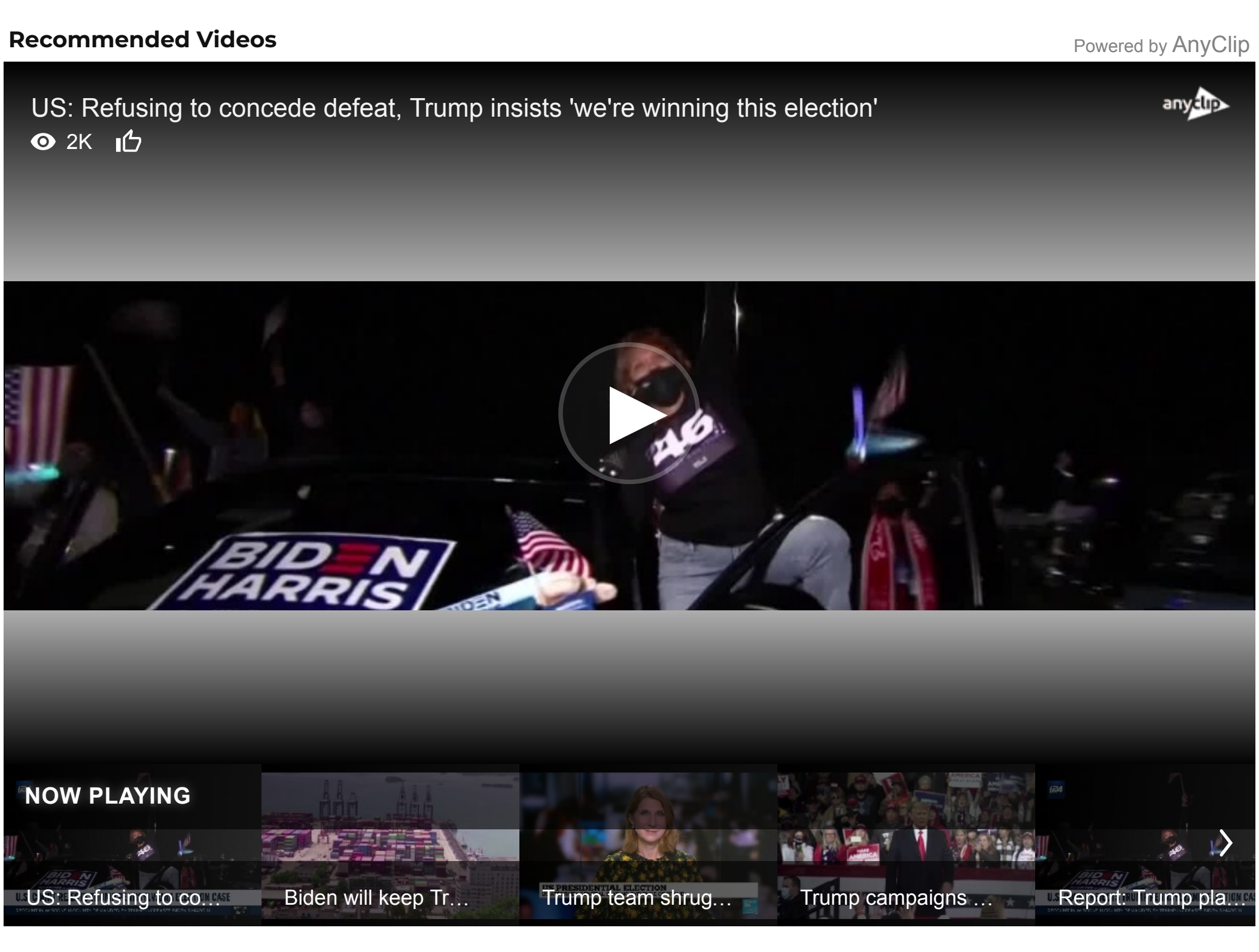

"President Trump's blockade on information and resources only makes the country less safe and puts more people's health at risk," Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island said in a statement late Friday. "With a pandemic raging and threats around the globe, the Trump administration's dangerous choice to withhold information from America's next president is a needless, avoidable, self-inflicted blow to national security and public health."

The bipartisan 9/11 Commission in 2002 identified the delayed presidential transition at the beginning of the previous year as one of the causes behind what amounted to the most consequential terrorist attack this century. And it specified that outgoing administrations must help prepare their successors to prevent another "catastrophic attack that could occur with little or no notice."

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Biden's victory followed a conclusion from the Department of Homeland Security that the election amounted to "the most secure in American history," despite prior concerns about potential foreign interference.

Trump has nonetheless continued to claim that he, in fact, won the election.

Reed on Friday called on the commander in chief to direct the head of the General Services Administration to begin the necessary process that would allow the Biden administration to begin preparing to take over power – particularly granting to incoming officials access to classified intelligence briefings "to ensure a smooth, complete, peaceful transfer of power."

The 9/11 Commission, assembled by Congress in 2002 to better understand what allowed for those attacks to take place, cited specific vulnerabilities caused by the delay in the George W. Bush administration's assumption of power following delays caused by the contested election in late 2000 and early 2001. A delay in the process to confirm incoming national security officials prevented their taking office for months and forestalled their access to the information that would better help them understand how to address pressing threats, the report concludes.

[**MORE:** Joe Biden Begins His Transition, Despite Trump's Claims]

For example, the report cites contemporaneous accounts at the time that indicate the incoming Bush administration officials were not immediately aware of a CIA and National Security Council staff assessment of the specific threats posed by al-Qaida leaders operating in Afghanistan and the need to empower anti-Taliban forces there to undermine the efforts of terrorist organizers and their local enablers.

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Among its subsequent recommendations, the committee stated, "The outgoing administration should provide the president-elect, as soon as possible after Election Day, with classified, compartmented list that catalogues specific, operational threats to national security; major military or covert operations; and pending decisions on the possible use of force."

"Such a document could provide both notice and a checklist, inviting a president-elect to inquire and learn more," the committee concluded.

Reed's concerns were echoed earlier last week by a collection of other national security officials, including some who served under Trump. In a letter obtained by Politico, the officials said the transition process must begin to grant the incoming administration access to information "needed to address pressing national security issues, such as the President's Daily Briefing and pending decisions on possible uses of military force." Signatories of the letter included former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, as well as a collection of former Trump administration officials, including U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Doug Silliman.

Paul D. Shinkman, Senior Writer, National Security

Paul Shinkman is a national security correspondent. He joined U.S. News & World Report in 2012 ... **READ MORE »**

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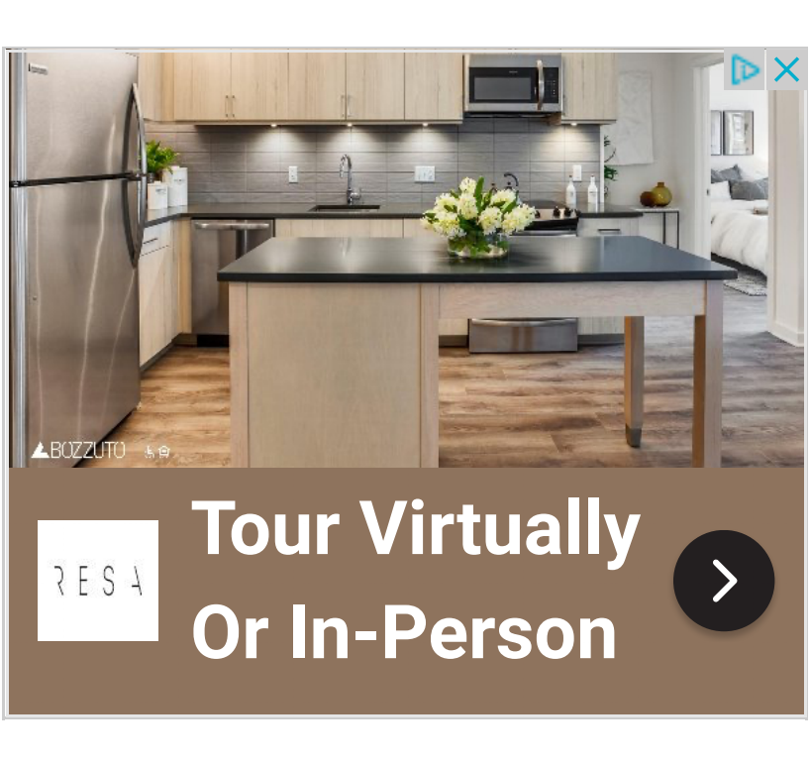

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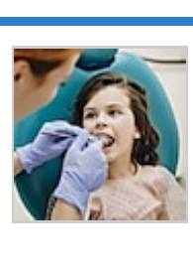

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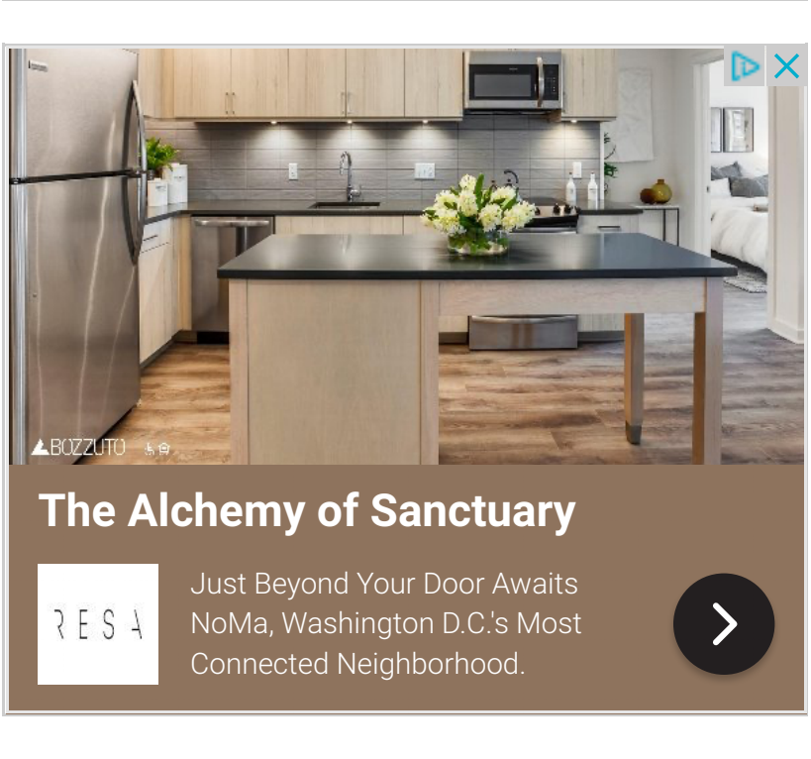
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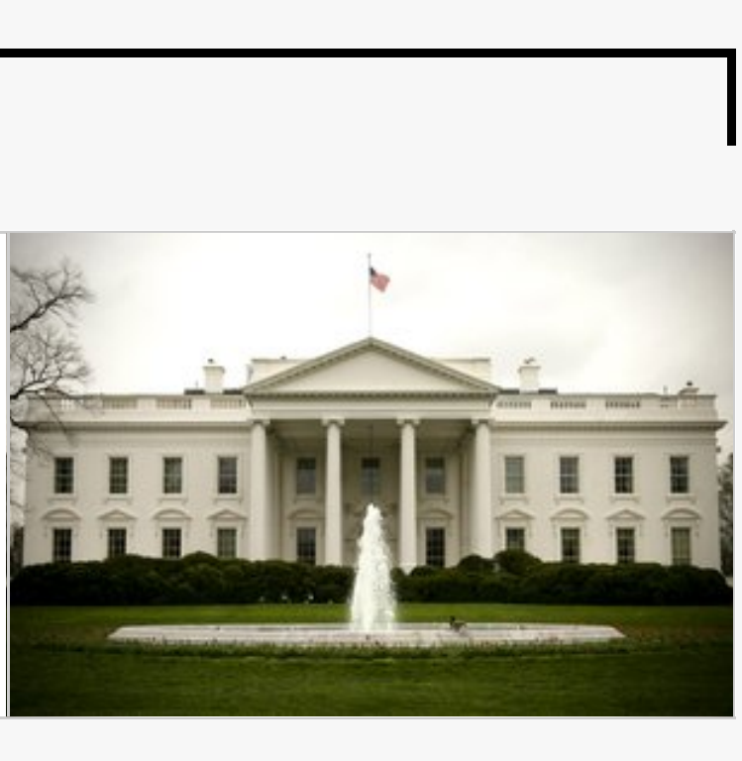

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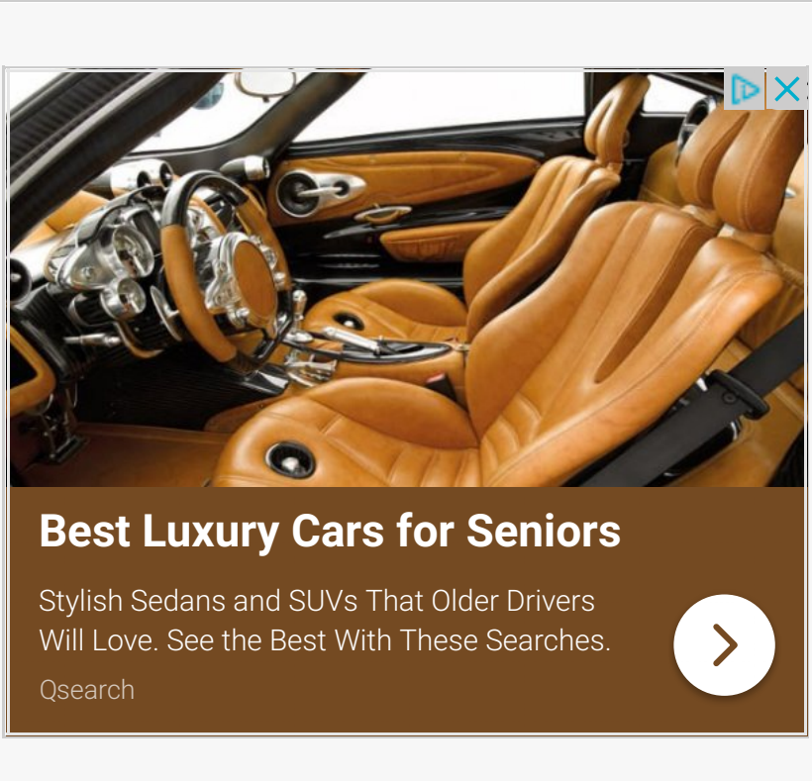
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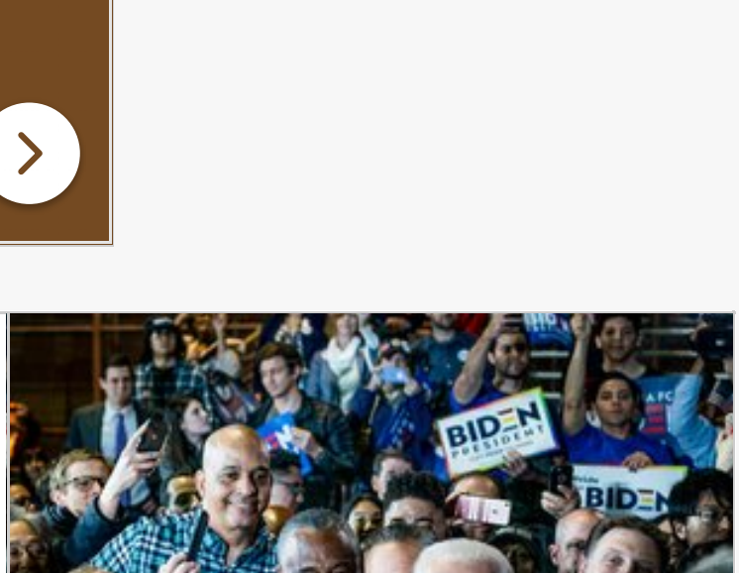

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The Trump administration is likely to appeal the ruling, which restores the DACA program in full, though those efforts will almost certainly be abandoned after Joe Biden is sworn in.

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Trump Purges Pentagon Advisory Board

The Defense Business Board is the second advisory committee to the Pentagon that acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller has targeted for replacement with Trump supporters.

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The president-elect said he expects any measure to be followed by the passage of additional aid in a new era of bipartisanship on Capitol Hill.

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Trump Withdraws U.S. From Somalia

The withdrawal orders mark the third country the lame-duck president has targeted for troop drawdowns, despite Pentagon assertions that it is not 'disengaging from Africa.'

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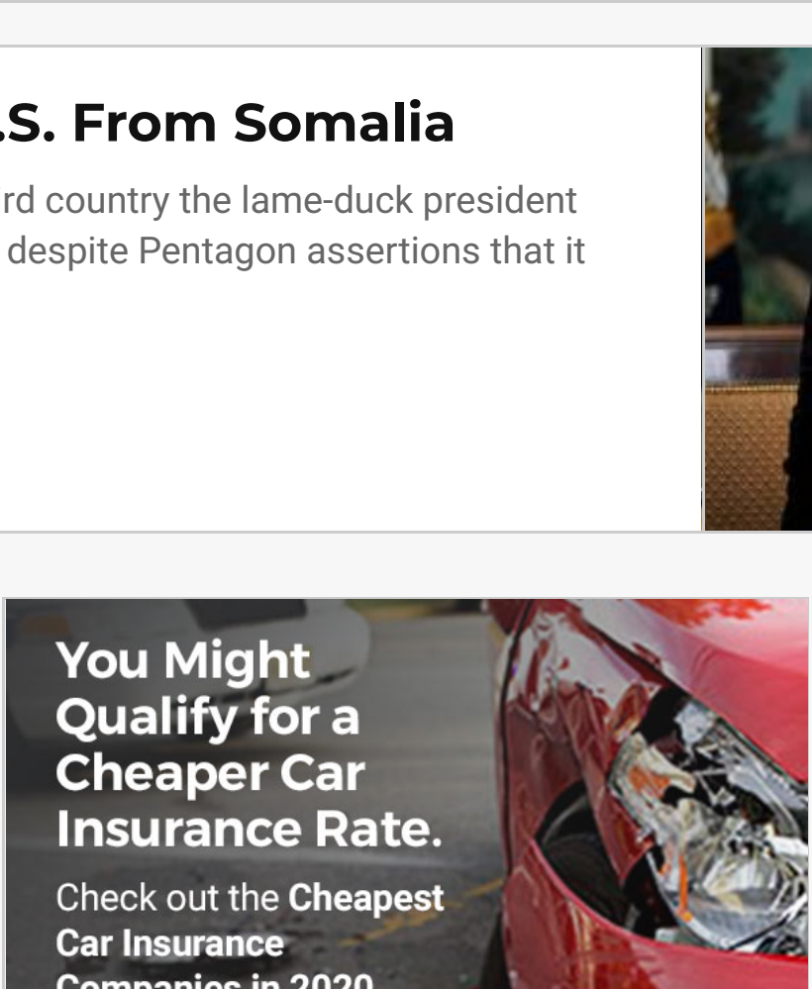
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Her statements come after lawmakers introduced a $908 billion relief plan earlier this week that she believes could be the basis for bicameral negotiations.

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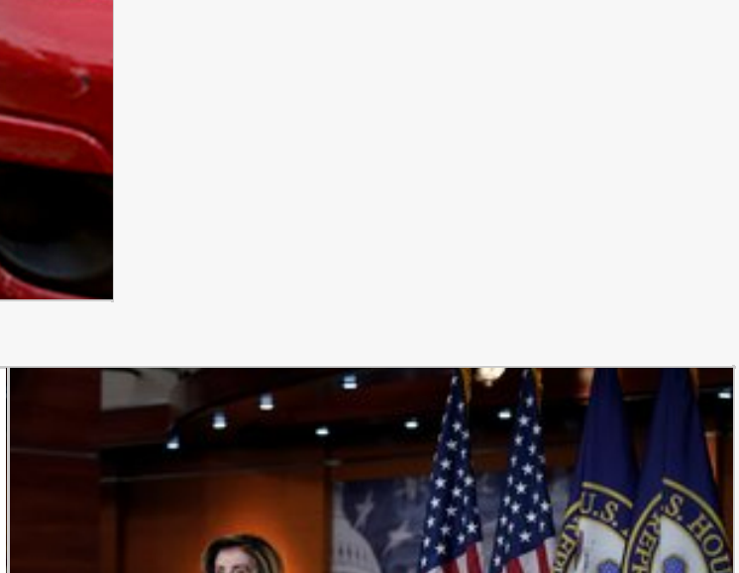

Teachers Seek Vaccine Priority

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